

POLISH BROTHERHOOD MEETING HALL
523 South Fifth Street
Jeannette
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6088

HABS
PA
65-JEAN,
70-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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ADDENDUM TO:
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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POLISH BROTHERHOOD MEETING HALL

HABS No. PA-6088

- LOCATION: 523 South Fifth Street, Jeannette, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania
- SIGNIFICANCE: A high concentration of window, tableware, bottle and specialty glass plants distinguished Jeannette as "The Glass City" early in its history. Significant housing stock consists of company-built row and detached double houses, and several privately constructed dwellings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Polish Society of Brother Help of Justice purchased this property from A.J. Smith in 1914, but met in club rooms on both South Fourth Street and Division Avenue until the meeting hall had been completed eight years later. Eight residents of Jeannette signed the organization's application to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for a corporation charter in January 1914, listing the group as local branch no. 1380 of the Polish National Alliance. Membership was restricted to "men of Polish, Slavish, Lithuanian and Rutherian birth and of Roman or Greek Catholic Creed." The stated purpose of the incorporation was "the maintenance of a Society for benevolent and protective purposes, in aiding its members to perpetuate the Polish and English languages, and to secure moral as well as intellectual and material elevation, and to foster brotherly love and intellectual freedom among its members, to broaden their intelligence by instructive reading in English and Polish, to be better learned in the English language and the American Institutions and Forms of Government." The organization was also intended to assist newly arrived immigrants and the families of its members in case of need, sickness or death. Regular and special dues, as well as income from picnics and dances, went to these purposes and even the support of orphaned children until they reached the age of fifteen.

Three members of the Society: Walter Oldakowski, Victor Pavlick, and Felix Zbrzezni, were instrumental in building the hall by mortgaging their own property to raise the necessary funds. Shortly after the building had been completed, the organization changed its name to the Polish Society Brotherhood of Justice & Falcons Branch No. 529. Twenty years later in 1943, the charter was again revised under the name Polish

Brotherhood of the White Eagle. The group remains a men's service and social organization, and although full beneficial membership is still restricted by nationality, social members can come from any background. There is also a women's auxiliary.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

This large one-story hall built in 1922 is a unique surviving example of an ethnic benevolent society and social club in the study area. Decorative, brick-banded rectangular panels on the façade are accented with stone corner pieces, and the central half-round projection is repeated above the front windows in a false Palladian window design. The majority of the window openings on the façade were infilled with brick or glass block during renovations in the 1960s. The façade plaque reads: DOM-POLSKI, P.S. of B.H. of Justice, 1922. The main floor is a bar/clubroom, and the full basement is used for meetings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Insurance Maps of Jeannette, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1916, 1925.

Deed Books. Recorder of Deeds, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, 291/14, 468/386, 481/461, 554/454, 555/153, 561/524, 746/530, 1147/524.

Tax Assessment Books. Westmoreland County Tax Assessment Office, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

Corporation Books. Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

Interview, Ted Zbrzezni, President, Polish Brotherhood of the White Eagle, August 29, 1990.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

In February 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), HABS and HAER undertook a comprehensive documentation of Jeannette, documenting industries, housing and cultural institutions.